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BEFORE THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE

ON FOREIGN OPERATIONS

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Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Subcommittee:

I am honored to appear before you today to speak on the East Timor issue. I appreciate your concern for this issue which involves almost unparalleled human tragedy and which raises very important questions about American arms transfer practices, human rights policy and overall foreign and military priorities and objectives.

A missing element of the discussion in earlier hearings on East Timor is an assessment of U. S. military interests in Indonesia. Just how important is Indonesia to the United States? This question is at the heart of American policy towards East Timor. The U. S. government has not taken a stand against harsh Indonesian military actions in East Timor because it has assumed that other factors in the Indonesian-American relationship override any interest we have in her little neighbor, East Timor.

We need to take a careful look at these factors and examine their importance to determine the reason the United States has been willing to provide Indonesia with the weapons to attack East Timor in an apparent violation of the 1958 U. S.-Indonesian Mutual Defense Agreement, the human rights sections of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 and the International Security Assistance and Arms Export Control Act of 1976, and the provisions of the United Nations Charter.

Most often, U. S. military interests in Indonesia are justified by such statements as, "Because of its strategic location, Indonesia's friendship is vital to American national security." Terms like "strategic" and "national security" are bandied about these days, but we need to look beyond labels and assess whether or not and to what extent Indonesia is essential or even important to the defense of the United States.

I am not a specialist on East Timor, but I have followed the events there as closely as possible. I have spent eight years as Director of the Center for Defense Information and 31 years active duty in the Navy with many years of duty in the Pacific and many years in strategic planning in the Pacific area.

If East Timor were an independent country, even one ruled by forces hostile to the U. S., it would not pose any sort of military danger or threat to the interests of the United States. East Timor is too small, poor, and underdeveloped to be a military threat to anyone in the foreseeable future. There are no useful military base facilities in East Timor. It has no navy or air force and could probably never develop any military capability beyond territorial defense.

The only possible military importance of East Timor is its location at the edge of the Ombai-Wetar strait on the northern coast. This strait could be used for the submerged passage of U. S. missile submarines (SSBNs), but the installation of the Trident missiles in Poseidon subs and the near deployment of the first Trident sub eliminates any possible requirement for U.S. use as a route to the Indian Ocean. We do not regularly operate our missile subs in the Indian Ocean.

Indonesia is an important nation but of little military interest to the United States. We have no military treaty with Indonesia and Indonesia provides no support of any kind for American troops stationed elsewhere in Asia. There are no American military bases or facilities or combat troops in Indonesia. There is little need to use Indonesian airfields or ports because of the proximity to major naval and air bases in the Philippines, as well as extensive facilities in Guam, Diego Garcia, and Australia. One indication of Indonesia's limited military importance to the U. S. is the fact that neither Secretary of Defense Brown nor Chairman JCS, General Jones mention Indonesia in their Reports to the Congress for FY 1981.

Indonesia does not contribute to the defense of the U. S. Most of its weapons are designed for use against domestic forces, not for missions outside immediate territorial boundaries.

The primary U. S. military interest vis-a-vis Indonesia is generally acknowledged to be unimpeded passage through its straits. Two of the four Indonesian straits are important to the United States. Nearly all commercial vessels go through Malacca. Supertankers, large warships, and submarines must go through Lombak. Since the U. S. Pacific Fleet is also responsible for operations in the Indian Ocean, it needs to traverse those waterways. The alternative is the much longer route around the southern coast of Australia.

The U. S. is not in danger of having its right of passage denied no matter what stance it takes on East Timor. It is doubtful that Indonesia would be inclined to impede U. S. transit. Even when the U. S. suspended all military aid to Indonesia during the Sukarno years, the straits were not closed to American vessels. If Indonesia wants to express political displeasure, it surely will choose a less risky means of doing so than trying to stop passage of American ships. Clearly, the U. S. can employ its navy ships to keep the straits open if we choose to do so.

In sum, the U. S. has no military interests of overriding importance in Indonesia. It certainly has no military interests which should blind us to the Indonesian actions in East Timor. Indonesia does provide us a significant quantity of oil -- 5 percent of all we import, but this should not prevent us from the maintenance of our

own standards and restraints on arms sales to nations violating basic human rights.

American military assistance and diplomatic support have been essential to Indonesia's war effort in East Timor. U. S. military weapons have furthered Indonesia's development of the jungle forces it uses in East Timor. U. S. officials have stated that during the invasion of East Timor that 90 percent of the Indonesian weapons were made in the United States. For the year just before Indonesia's invasion in FY 1975, the United States pledged 450 percent more military assistance to Indonesia than the previous year. U. S. weapons enabled Indonesia to launch its two major offensives of the war in 1977 and 1978. Deliveries of Rockwell OV-10 Bronco aircraft changed the entire nature of the war.

The events in Iran should have taught us that it is unwise to become closely identified with repressive, unpopular regimes. U. S. weapons which are used for suppression engender hostility toward America and reduce our ability to lead the world in advancing human rights. Indonesia is an obvious case where the U. S. now knows its weapons are not used for defense, but to suppress a neighbor and acquire territory.